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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8253
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 8094
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 1274
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0173
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0411
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 0821
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 1180
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001407

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STATE PASS FAA FOR ACONLEY,
TRANSPORTATION FOR FAA; DAKAR PLEASE PASS TO FAA REP ED
JONES; ROME PLEASE PASS TO TSA REP JOHN HALINSKI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/09/2015

TAGS: EAIR EINV PREL NI

SUBJECT: BELLVIEW AIRLINE CRASH INVESTIGATION FRAUGHT WITH
IRREGULARITIES

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne
for reasons 1.4 (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator Dennis Jones told Consul General that numerous lapses occurred in the Nigerian investigation of the 2005 Bellview airlines crash jet that killed 117 persons, including a member of the U.S. Mission in Nigeria. The Director of Nigeria's Accident Investigation Prevention Board, who revealed the irregularities to Jones, has been told not to participate in the investigation and fears for his life. The irregularities in the investigation have come to light only because of Jones, involvement and the trust he has built up with his Nigerian counterparts through his painstaking work in Nigeria. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a return visit to Nigeria following the October 25 Bellview airlines crash, NTSB investigator Dennis Jones told Consul General that the investigation being conducted by Nigerian authorities was fraught with errors. Under International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the NTSB plays a purely advisory role in the investigations of foreign air accidents. Primary responsibility for the investigation is in the hands of the host government's aviation authority, Jones said. Nonetheless, because Nigeria's Accident Investigations and Prevention Board (AIPB) has little experience and NTSB has a good relationship with the AIPB, U.S. investigators and industry representatives played a significant role in observing the investigation.

¶3. (C) Jones was originally told the Bellview B737-200 crashed ten minutes after takeoff; that the pilot sent no distress calls; that the crash site was looted, and that the black boxes were never located.

¶4. (C) However, on Jones's second trip to work with the AIPB, several Nigerian officials connected with the investigation reported conflicting information. Jonathan Ibrahim (STRICTLY PROTECT) a pilot and former CEO of Nigeria Airways, chaired the commission established to investigate the crash. He told Jones that the crash investigation report had been completed three to four months ago. Ibrahim commented that:

-- The pilot had issued a distress call that was captured on tape, and the AIPB investigators never listened to the tape.

(NOTE: Jones reported that AIPB said they had listened to the tape and that there was no distress call on it. END NOTE)

-- The flight recorders had been found and were taken to a police station adjacent to the crash site.

¶ 15. (C) Jones subsequently spoke with AIPB Director Angus Ozoka (STRICTLY PROTECT). Ozoka said he became aware of the black boxes following a review of a letter from the Inspector General of the Police to then-Minister of Aviation Borishade stating that the recorders had been found and given to crash investigators. Ozoka told Jones that he checked with the Aviation Ministry, and was told "the Ministry is handling the investigation." The Director expressed concern to Jones that he would not pursue the inquiry further, and feared for his life. The whereabouts of the recorders remain unknown to Ozoka.

¶ 16. (C) Director Ozoka also told Jones State Security Service (SSS) representatives had visited the AIPB investigator assigned to the case, who was first at the crash site. Ozoka said he does not know what took place at the interview, but the investigator, Remi Faminu (STRICTLY PROTECT), thereafter retired from the AIPB. Ozoka reported Faminu provided conflicting statements and said that he "took some tapes home" from the crash site, and had given his wallet and the tapes to someone at the airport who had "offered" to hold them while he was working.

¶ 17. (C) Bellview has applied to the U.S. Department of Transportation for permission to fly direct routes to the United States. Approval could be jeopardized by negative results from Bellview crash report, Jones said. Ozoka told Jones that Bellview has been protected because it is owned by

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a Yoruba. (NOTE: The former minister of aviation is Yoruba as is the current one. Ozoka is Igbo. END NOTE) As evidence, Ozoka cited the fact that Sosoliso airline is owned by a member of the Igbo ethnic group, and was grounded following a crash in late 2005, while Bellview has never been grounded.

¶ 18. (C) A number of factors may have contributed to the crash, said Jones, including poor weather, pilot error and faulty machinery. In addition, questions surround the final communication between air traffic controllers and the pilot. Jones was able to obtain the air traffic control tapes, which have a 4 to 6 minute gap between the time the distress call was made and the time the plane was reported missing. The air traffic controllers may have been inattentive or absent from the tower and not heard the distress call until they themselves played back the tape, Jones speculated. In addition, Jones stated there were questions about the physical condition of the pilot. He had received a gunshot wound to the head within the year preceding the flight, an injury that would in other countries have prevented him from obtaining the medical certification required to fly.

¶ 19. (C) Comment: It has been more than a year since the Bellview crash, and the investigation report still has not been issued. This stands in contrast to the December 10, 2005 Sosoliso crash, for which a report was issued within ten months. Jones's involvement has unearthed glaring investigation irregularities that call into question the motives of the political leadership in the aviation sector. End Comment. CONFIDENTIAL

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